

# Urban Bird Collective | MOU Savaloja Grant Report 2021

IN APRIL 2021 the Minnesota Ornithologists Union granted the Urban Bird Collective a \$1,840 Savaloja Grant to continue diversifying the MN birding community.



Our vision is to empower those individuals who are already immersed in their neighborhoods, have a strong connection to the people and the place and an interest in the natural world, to lead others in exploring birds and nature close to home. Through this shared experience they will build community connections, increase awareness and stewardship of birds and nature and facilitate ongoing multi-generational participation in outdoor recreation – for the health of people and birds.

Our goal for 2021 was to use the majority of our time to specifically engage BIPOC nonprofits and support them with cultural healing opportunities with the birds.

While our plans continued to be affected by COVID, we felt like we had a little more leeway to engage more folks. We continued to follow the MN and CDC guidelines to guide our interactions with the community.

Our signature event, the Urban Bird Collective Gathering - Unity on the Flyway was a huge success even with size limitations. On May 15, 2021 we held the Gathering. UBC put many hours into planning which started in Dec-May. We hosted 10 different walk opportunities, engaged over 45 folks and provided food and refreshments to participants. Success to us was having almost 80% participation from the BIPOC community. They gave nothing but praise about our leaders and how welcomed they felt.

Quote from a Native American participant- *"Growing up I always wanted to learn more about birdwatching but it seemed like such a white leisurely hobby that was inaccessible to me because my family did not engage in any sort of leisure or recreation due to the fact that they were always working. My parents were migrant farmworkers and affording equipment, training or time for any sort of recreational activity was not something that I would even imagine asking. Thus, as a child, I thought that something like enjoying the beauty of watching or learning more about birds was not something that we could participate in. Today my Dakota/Ojibwe/Mexican daughter went birding for the second time with us, her parents, and the Collective in a supportive, nonjudgmental open space that was safe for BIPOC. Watching her just enjoy being at a wildlife refuge surrounded by trees, making observations about the singing of birds and her excitement when we spotted birds and got to look at them up closely was healing for me. Grateful for the*

*space that UBC has opened up for us to explore the outdoors together more and to learn more about our winged relatives in the trees and in the sky. Thank you."*

#### Other Accomplishments in 2021:

- Our leaders made 12 exploratory outings to various parts of the MN River Valley Wildlife Refuge and parks in the Twin Cities to get better acquainted with the main birding hotspots and trails.
  - Dudley Edmundson and Monica Bryand collaborated in two events, one was Winter Birding 101 and the other was Birding 101. Both events were hosted by the Mpls Parks Foundation and live-streamed and had over 500 people viewing.
  - Urban Bird Collective leaders participated in 10 Christmas Bird Counts totalling over 250 hours in volunteer time.
  - We have worked on building our organizational infrastructure. We're still working on our 501c3 status but we have secured resources to support: insurance, website hosting and maintenance, and database.
  - Monica Bryand and other leaders continue to be resources for those needing to start the conversation on how to make their organizations (birding) more inclusive and less exclusive.
  - Added four new leaders.
- Worked with a new partner Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge to host BIPOC centered events. We took 15 BIPOC folks up to Sherburne in June for a walk and lunch. In October we hosted 2 special sandhill crane viewing events in which we brought over 50 people, 95% BIPOC, to see the amazing sandhill cranes staging process. For the sandhill crane events, Monica did outreach to BIPOC and Native American communities in the Saint Cloud area. People were blown away by the event and felt incredibly special to be given this access. We plan on deepening our partnership with Sherburne and are already in talks for 2022.
- Deepened existing relationships/partnerships and explored and developed new relationships.  
New Relationship - Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, MN Land Trust, Osprey Wilds, Hawk Ridge, Wolf Ridge, International Wolf Center, Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Tribe, Three Rivers, Dream of Wild Health, Birdability & the Bell Museum

#### Our Timeline, Activities and Results

- Jan-May 2021 - planning for the UBC Gathering - Unity in the Flyway (May 15, 2022)
- Joined several ongoing coalitions of outdoor birding groups. The Twin Cities Urban Bird Coalitions, LONA -
- Monica Bryand joined the Board of the Great River Passageway and Loreen Lee (UBC Leader) joined the Board of the MN River Valley National Wildlife Refuge
- April-June 2021 – 12 exploratory walks at various areas at the MN River Valley National Wildlife Area and parks around the Twin Cities
- April through November 2021 - met with existing partner organizations and new folks which included Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, Three Rivers, the MPLS Parks Foundation BIPOC Outdoors Twin Cities
- April-Sept 2021 - did outreach to Twin Cities BIPOC nonprofits and groups to offer and arrange walks
- April- Sept 2021
  - Supported walks
  - Provided special skills outing specifically for the leaders
  - Brought 8 Leaders to Warbler Weekend in Redwing
  - Brought 6 Leaders to Hawk Ridge for the Fall Hawk Migration
  - Led walks for 10 BIPOC Orgs/groups

- Because of our deep relationships with the Native American Community and our leader Hope Flannagan we were approached by the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Tribe to support a Christmas Bird Count that we are now officially calling, *They See Birds*. We helped facilitate the counting area with National Audubon and the local MN coordinator Steve Weston. This is an incredible opportunity and honor for us. We are hoping to recruit 20-30 Native American counters and 20-30 folks that will be majority BIPOC for the 15 mile circle.

**We made and adjust ment to the proposed budget based on what we received. \$1,840**

<b>Description</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Actual</b>
Compensation for time for Monica	\$400	\$211
Stipends for the UBC walk leaders (2 per walk) 2 X 20 X \$50	\$2000	\$1500
Snacks & water for walks	\$100	)
Fiscal Sponsorship Fee	\$175	\$129
	<b>\$2,675</b>	<b>\$1,840</b>

## SUMMARY and CONCLUSION

We are very thankful for the ongoing support that we've received from the Savaloja Fund. We have built a strong base of leaders and have built on our reputation as an organization folks can come to for advice and guidance on equity and inclusion in the birding community.

We continue to work with the reality that COVID will be with us for a longtime and will do what we can to get people connected to nature (birds) and stay safe & healthy.

As we reflect on this past year, we feel like we are doing incredible work, building deep/strategic relationships, UBC is that go to organization that other look to for support with diversity and inclusion questions.



### **Future Plans Include:**

- Meeting monthly to continue deepening our relationships and developing our birding skills
- Expand our impact with the CBC
- Explore a deeper partnership with strategic partners
- Deepen our work with Sherburne and The MN River Valley National Wildlife Refuge
- Support BIPOC communities in need of healing justice opportunities to be out in nature
  - Hybrid Annual Urban Bird Collective Gathering at the MN RVNWR May 15- 2022
  - Work on our 501c3 status

### **Closing thoughts:**

The Urban Bird Collective appreciates the long-term support of MOU and the Savaloja Fund. The long-term investment helped us to slowly get our legs under us and build a solid base. We have received support from a variety of sources, including contracted support.